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ABSTRACT

To increase interactions and to improve communication between the school and home, the TransParent School concept was developed. The TransParent School Model (TSM) includes computer-based calling from the school and uses electronic mailboxes so parents can call and hear a message from the teacher every day. The model, first implemented in a school in Huntsville, Alabama, is currently in various stages of planning, implementation, or operation in 10 states. An evaluation of the effects of the model at the Carter Lawrence Middle School in Nashville, Tennessee, which serves 315 families, indicated that: (1) the TSM accounted for 70 to 110 daily contacts between teachers and parents; (2) calls from homes increased over all other parent/teacher contacts 580 percent during one test period; (3) parents initiated contacts with the school about six times more often than they had previously; and (4) students from homes that frequently used the model's services showed a significant increase in homework completion. (KM)

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THE TRANSPARENT SCHOOL: USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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THE TRANSPARENT SCHOOL MODEL:

USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Model Description - The TransParent School concept was developed by Dr. Jerold P. Bauch in 1987 to increase the interaction and improve the communication between school and home. The model includes computer-based calling from the school and uses electronic mailboxes so parents can call and hear a message from the teacher every day.

Two technical systems are used. The school provides each teacher with an electronic mailbox that functions just like a telephone answering machine. The enters a 1-3 minute message at the end of each school day that summarizes the learning activities, specifies home work assignments, and includes suggestions to parents for home learning. Parents can call and hear the message at any time, and can also leave a message for the teachers. Electronic mailbox services are available in some areas from the phone company or private service providers.

The second technical system is an autodialing and data-based management system called Compu-Call, which will automatically place phone calls to any or all parents. The school user records a message and specifies which parent should be called.

The computer places the calls and keeps records of calls completed, which can be printed out the next day. The Compu-Call system also has an integrated attendance management system and consists of digital voice hardware installed in an IBM-compatible computer with the data-based software programs to place the calls.

History - The Model was first used at the Academy for Academics and Arts, a K-8 public magnet school in Huntsville, Alabama (Ms. Dot Davis, principal; 2800 Poplar Avenue, Huntsville, AL 35805; [205] 532-4750). After installation in November of 1987, the model increased parent/teacher interaction by 460%, and regularly accounts for more than twice the number of contacts over all other forms of parent involvement at the school.

The second full implementation of the model was at the Carter Lawrence Middle School (Dr. George Kersey, principal; 110 12th Avenue, S., Nashville, TN 37203 [615] 742-6410). About 1/3 of the parents in this urban school community call for messages from teachers **each day**, more detailed evaluation results are provided below. The Carter Lawrence trial was supported by South Central Bell in Nashville.

The Inman Middle School was the first site to use full electronic mailbox services in the Atlanta Public School

System. (Dr. Betty Strickland, principal; 774 Virginia Avenue, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30306; [404] 853-4017. The Inman mailbox access number is 404, 594-5812.) Further trials are currently underway in Memphis, Tennessee at the Dunbar Elementary School and the Raleigh Bartlett Meadows School. These trials have been supported by the BellSouth Corporation and a BellSouth Foundation Grant.

The model is at various stages of planning and implementation in Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, New Jersey, Maryland, Missouri, Colorado, Minnesota, Louisiana, and Texas. Applications have been in Head Start Centers, elementary, middle schools and secondary schools.

Results - An evaluation of the effects of the model at the Carter Lawrence Middle School in Nashville produced some exciting results. This middle school serves a low income housing project community. Even though there were some very good person-to-person parent involvement relationships in place at the school, the baseline data on all types of contacts between parents and teachers was just like the national average; about 2 contacts with parents per teacher per day. The TransParent School Model was implemented in January of 1989 with the following results:

1. There are about 315 families in the school community, and

the TSM accounts for 70 - 110 **daily** contacts between teachers and parents. Calls from home showed a 580% increase over all other parent/teacher contacts during one test period.

2. Parents now initiate contacts with the school about six times more often than they did before the model started.

3. Two groups of parents were studied in detail. One was a "low calling" group who seldom used the services of the model; the other was a "frequent user" group who used the system very often. Students from the "frequent user" homes showed a significant increase in homework completion. Parents also perceived that is was the model that produced this change, and 93% noticed other improvements in their child's attitudes, skills and responsibility.

4. There was no difference on SES between the low and frequent users of the system.

5. About half of both frequent and infrequent users reported no previous involvement with the school. The dramatic increase in parent/teacher contact seems to demonstrate that parents in urban settings with respond to the model when they were not involved in the more traditional involvement opportunities.

6. The school uses the computer-based outcalling capability to

send messages home, including invitations to parent meetings, reminders that report cards are coming out, and congratulations to students for performance and accomplishments.

New technical advances - There are now several experiments underway to integrate outcalling and electronic mailbox incalling under one software program in a desktop personal computer. These new products will drive the overall cost of the model down because there can be purchased and owned by the school with no monthly or service charges.

The Betty Phillips Center - The Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University is a research and development center to improve and expand parent involvement in the schools. The Center provides planning, evaluation and staff development support to schools and is serving as a national clearing house on uses of telecommunications for parent involvement. For further information, please contact:

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